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ABSTRACT

A course in speech writing (preparing speeches for delivery by another person) is critical to the development of public speaking skills for college students. Unlike the traditional public speaking course, speech writing classes emphasize the preparation of the content of a speech over the delivery of the message. Students develop the ability to construct an eloquent and appropriate message that fits the oral style of a speech. Factors such as arrangement, idea or argument development, evidence, emotional and ethical appeals, transitions, as well as stylistic features like the use of metaphors, antithesis, and personification come to the forefront. Additionally, instructors are not limited to five minutes of harried evaluation on the day the student gives the speech. Careful semester-long feedback is given to the students to indicate the strengths and weaknesses of their manuscripts. Speech writing classes complement the traditional public speaking class experience because they emphasize those elements of the public speaking process that tend to receive less attention due to the nature of a performance class. (KEH)

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SPEECH WRITING AND IMPROVING PUBLIC SPEAKING SKILLS

by

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In his 1943 "Military Edition" of the Principles of Speech Alan H. Monroe quoted the 1917 Adjutant General of the War Department: "A great number of men have failed at camp because of inability to articulate clearly. A man who cannot impart his idea to his command in clear distinct language, and with sufficient volume of voice to be heard reasonably far, is not qualified to give commands upon which human life will depend." (Monroe, 1). Public speaking has been regarded as a critical leadership skill throughout much of the history of our nation. The study of rhetoric was a central element of the 19th century college curriculum. Today, while the study of rhetoric no longer holds a central position in the curriculum, the study of public speaking remains an essential element in the preparation of students at many of America's colleges and universities. Furthermore, the number of students majoring in a communication related field has increased dramatically over the last decade. Whether it is due to the popularity of public relations or radio-TV-film or organizational communication, the fact remains that more students are pursuing communication majors than ever before.* Given the Communication's field's popularity and the traditional role of public speaking as a key curricular component, it seems appropriate that we examine the way in which we approach to teaching of public speaking.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the relevancy of

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*The number of communication majors at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater has increased 600% since 1982.

a speech writing class (preparing speeches for delivery by another person) to the development of public speaking skills. The paper will focus on four questions: First, how important are public speaking skills? Second, what is or is not emphasized in the traditional public speaking class. Third, how are public speaking skills developed in the speech writing class, and finally, how does that development differ from the traditional public speaking class.

A 1989 survey of personnel directors found that they regarded oral or speaking skills as the number one factor "in helping graduating college students obtain employment." (Curtis, 11). The survey also revealed the belief on the part of the personnel directors that speaking ability ranked second only to interpersonal/human relations skills in the category of "skills important for successful job performance." (Curtis, 11) Grombeck and McKerrow argued in their latest edition of Principles and Types of Speech Communication that ". . . oral (and written) communication skills, . . ., are useful to virtually any entry-level position in American education, business, government work, service industries, or other occupation." (Grombeck, 7). Al Weitzel supports the conclusions reached by Curtis and Grombeck in his work entitled Careers for Speech Communication Graduates. He, along with other researchers, have concluded that graduates regard communication skills to be critical in the hiring process as well as the promotion

process. (Grombeck, 17).

The study of public speaking is not only critical to developing leadership skills or achieving success in one's job performance, it is also essential if a free and open society is to be maintained. Wilson and Arnold noted the significance of "speech as a liberal study" when they wrote:

> . . .to be liberally educated is to be personally and socially effective, and being able to interact purposely with other people through speaking and listening is a significant part of being "personally and socially effective." . . .Looked at in this way, the ultimate end of studying public speaking is to achieve social understanding--of one's self and of others. (Wilson, 7).

Possibly Isocrates said it best when he argued that the "power of speech" is central to all that humans have achieved. He noted, "because there has been implanted in us the power to persuade each other and to make clear to each other whatever we desire, . . .there is no institution devised by man which the power of speech has not helped us to establish." (Norlin, 327).

Clearly, the study of public speaking remains a critical element in the preparation of college students. Given this relative level of importance, the next question to be addressed is how one prepares students as public speakers. While most college students receive some training in public speaking through a basic level course, those who major in such Speech Communication related fields as public relations, radio television and film, broadcast journalism, training and development, rhetoric and public address, and organizational

communication need extensive preparation in the area of public speaking. It seems logical that a student graduating with a degree in a communication related emphasis should be regarded as an above average oral communicator. Given that assumption, the preparation of such students in the area of public speaking becomes even more critical.

For the most part, one would expect that public speaking courses (courses that require the student to give speeches) would suffice in preparing those students who are specializing in the communication field. A review of the leading texts in the area of public speaking suggests that these students do receive excellent preparation. However, a closer examination suggests that the typical approach to public speaking may be inadequate due to its emphasis on the delivery of the speech.

Most public speaking courses emphasize the final product. That is to say, the grade that is earned, is earned for the oral presentation. While the preparation of the speech is noted as an essential element in the speech process, the student's fate rests not so much on how carefully he/she prepared the speech, but rather on how well the speech works the day it is delivered. This is not to say that instructors do not evaluate the content of student speeches. Rather, it is argued that, in too many cases, content preparation is not evaluated nor emphasized to the degree it needs to be.

The delivery style used in most public speaking classes further exacerbates this situation. The most popular delivery style (and rightly so) is extemporaneous. (Lucas, 235). This style is the most frequently used inside the classroom and outside the classroom. Unfortunately, its use contributes to the dilemma mentioned earlier. The extemporaneous style places greater emphasis on the delivery of the speech and less emphasis on the preparation of the content of the speech. It is my belief that students who wish to specialize in the communication field need advanced work not only in the traditional public speaking classroom but also in a classroom setting that emphasizes the preparation of the message more so than its delivery. A traditional speech class that comes to mind when one considers such a goal is speech composition. Another class that fulfills this goal plus much more is speech writing (preparing speeches for delivery by another person). The speech writing class focuses student attention on three aspects of the art of public speaking that traditional classes tend to either overlook or fail to fully emphasize. Those three aspects are content preparation, manuscript delivery, and special occasion speaking.

While all public speaking classes emphasize to some degree the preparation of the content of the speech, the traditional public speaking instructor rarely requires any written documentation regarding the speech content other than

a preparatory outline. This outline is often in brief word/phrase form. Assuming the previous statement to be accurate, the instructor evaluates content development based upon a brief outline and the oral presentation of that content. It is doubtful that the evaluation of the content elements of a speech can be fully adequate without a written manuscript. Thus the instructor may find it difficult to give the student a thorough evaluation of his/her content due to the nature of the communication event. After all, how many of us find it challenging to listen to, comprehend, and evaluate a five minute student speech based upon the outline and oral presentation. Given this evaluation situation, it is not surprising that instructors focus on the overall image of the presentation rather than any particular element. After all, in the traditional public speaking class the instructor is seeking to evaluate the student as a speaker and not just as a speech writer. Thus the final product (which includes the delivery of the message) overshadows the parts that make up that product.

The speech writing class, as it is taught at the Univerisity of Wisconsin-Whitewater, permits the instructor to more closely examine a particular part of the process of public speaking: The preparation of the content of a speech. Unlike the traditional public speaking class very little attention is given to the delivery of the message. In fact, to a significant degree the Speech Writing instructor focuses

upon content and style elements only. Because the instructor evaluates a manuscript, rather than an oral presentation, the focus of the instructor's evaluation rests upon the development of the message. Factors such as arrangement, idea or argument development, evidence, emotional and ethical appeals, transitions, as well as stylistic features like the use of metaphors, antithesis, and personification come to the forefront. The student's success or failure in the course rests with his/her ability to construct an eloquent and appropriate message that fits the oral style.

The instructor's evaluation of the student's work results from the instructor's evaluation of the manuscripts submitted by the students. Thus the instructor is able to carefully and calmly evaluate the content factors mentioned above. The instructor is not limited to five minutes of harried writing on the day the student gives the speech. Just as we may give a term paper several readings and a careful and thorough evaluation, so to the Speech Writing instructor has the luxury of carefully examing the content and stylistic elements of the speech. The feedback given to the student clearly indicates the strengths and weaknesses of the manuscript and is not dependent upon the memory of the student or the instructor. Thus the student cannot later claim "That's not what I said," or "Yes! I did include a review." There can be no doubt as to the content of the speech in the speech writing class.

Furthermore, the student's work is evaluated privately as opposed to the public speaking class in which the student must deliver the speech publicly. It is difficult for the student to separate the evaluation of the speech from a judgement about his/her sense of self. Delivering a speech can be a nerve racking, traumatic experience for a student. Because the student focuses on the speech content and not the delivery of the speech, writing a manuscript tends not to be a traumatic experience. Thus, both the instructor and the student should find the speech writing class exercises useful in terms of improving the student's ability to construct a speech.

The speech writing class not only enables the student to improve his/her speech construction ability but it also sharpens the student's understanding of manuscript delivery. Since most public speaking classroom experiences probably involve extemporaneous delivery, a class that focuses attention upon manuscript delivery should be useful. The speech writing class does just that. The students are required to deliver one or two manuscript speeches and/or coach another person in the delivery of a manuscript speech. Through either experience a student gains a more complete understanding for, and appreciation of, the art of manuscript delivery. It is important to remember that many speakers use manuscripts even when they think they're giving an extemporaneous speech. Knowing how to work with a manuscript

while giving a speech should be of significant value to many students.

Finally, it should also be noted that the speech writing class, as it is taught at UW-Whitewater, focuses a great deal of attention upon special occasion speeches. While most public speaking texts dedicate a chapter to special occasion speeches, such speeches are usually not emphasized in these classes. The speech writing class requires students to write a "welcome speech," an "introduction speech," and an "inspiration speech." While the students also write an informative and a persuasive speech, all of the assignments in the speech writing class are driven by the occasion. Thus, the students become much more aware of the importance of the occasion to a speech in the speech writing class than they do in a typical public speaking class.

Besides preparing students to fully understand and operate in a speech writing situation, the speech writing class strengthens the student's knowledge of public speaking and especially his/her ability to construct an effective and appropriate speech. It seems clear that the speech writing class compliments the traditional public speaking class experience because it emphasizes those elements of the public speaking process that tend to receive less attention due to the nature of a performance class. Elements like argument development, the use of stylistic devices, manuscript delivery, and special occasion speaking require special

emphasis if students are to fully develop their understanding of the art of public speaking.

As instructors of public speaking we know that what a speaker says is just as critical, if not more critical, than how he/she says it. The speech writing class enables the instructor to focus his/her attention, as well as the student's attention, almost solely upon the development of what is said. Certainly this is a task worth undertaking and the outcome should be students who have improved public speaking skills.

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